

# RACIAL EQUALITY ACTIVISM IN BRAZIL, COMMUNICATION VIA NETWORKS AND INTERNET: AFROPRESS NEWS AGENCY<sup>1</sup>

ACTIVISMO POR LA IGUALDAD RACIAL EN BRASIL. LA COMUNICACIÓN A  
TRAVÉS DE REDES E INTERNET: AGENCIA DE NOTICIAS AFROPRESS

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**Abstract:** The objective of this article is to analyze the processes of establishing activist social communication networks by black social movements in Brazil related to Afro-Brazilians' struggles for citizenship. Recently, these struggles have culminated in the approval of the Racial Equality Act and government affirmative action policies for Brazilian university admissions. Within the scope of these processes, we analyze a specific contemporary experiment in networking by the black movement, developed by Afropress news agency. Initially, we review historic processes of inequality, resistance and mobilization of black populations in Brazil, identifying the establishment of social-communication activist networks starting with the uses black movements make of information and communication technology in their struggles for racial equality and citizenship for Afro-Descendants in the country. Second, from a Latin American cultural studies perspective, we analyze a specific case of internet use by Afropress news agency ([www.afropress.com.br](http://www.afropress.com.br)), which uses network communication as its main strategy for generating communicative flows to build and add visibility to the socio-cultural experiences of Afro-Brazilians and the agendas of struggles for racial equality. **Key words:** Afropress; Afro-Brazilian; communication in networks; black social movements; black press; internet.

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[01] The article includes the results of a doctoral study entitled *Usos da internet nos movimentos sociais negros em rede na luta pela igualdade racial no Brasil: Estudo de caso da Agência Afropress (Uses of the internet in networking black social movements in the struggle for racial equality in Brazil: a case study of Afropress news agency)*, by Leslie Sedrez Chaves, advised by professor Denise Cogo. This research has been in progress since 2010, in the research group Mídia, Cultura e Cidadania (Media, Culture and Citizenship: [www.gpmidiacidadania.com](http://www.gpmidiacidadania.com)), under the auspices of the graduate program in communications sciences of the University of the Sinos River Valley (UNISINOS), Brazil. The research proposed in this text is being developed with the support of scholarship from CAPES Foundation (Coordination for the Enhancement of Higher Level Personnel), Ministry of Education of Brazil.

**Resumen:** El objetivo de este artículo es analizar los procesos de establecimiento de redes de comunicación social de activistas de los movimientos sociales negros en Brasil, relacionados con la lucha afro-brasileños para la ciudadanía. Recientemente, estas luchas han culminado con la aprobación de la Ley de Igualdad Racial y de las políticas de acción afirmativa del gobierno para la admisión en las universidades brasileñas. Dentro del ámbito de aplicación de estos procesos, se analiza un caso contemporáneo específico en la creación de redes por el movimiento negro, desarrollado por la agencia de noticias Afropress. Inicialmente, se revisan los procesos históricos de la desigualdad, la resistencia y la movilización de las poblaciones negras en Brasil, la identificación del establecimiento de redes de activistas sociales de comunicación que comienzan con los usos que los movimientos negros hacen de las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación en su lucha por la igualdad racial y la ciudadanía en beneficio de los Afro-descendientes en el país. En segundo lugar, desde una perspectiva de estudios culturales de América Latina, se analiza el caso concreto del uso de Internet por la agencia de noticias Afropress ([www.afropress.com.br](http://www.afropress.com.br)), que utiliza la comunicación en red como su principal estrategia para generar flujos comunicativos con lo que se pretende construir y dar visibilidad a las experiencias socio-culturales de los afro-brasileños, así como la agenda de la lucha por la igualdad racial. **Keywords:** Afropress; afrobrasileños; comunicación en las redes; movimientos sociales negros; prensa negra; Internet.

## 1. Introduction

The objective of this article is to analyze processes to establish activist social-communication networks by black social movements in Brazil related to struggles for citizenship by Afro-Brazilians, which recently culminated in the approval of the Racial Equality Act and government affirmative action policies for Brazilian university admissions. Within the scope of these processes, we analyze a specific contemporary experiment in networking by the black movement, developed by Afropress news agency (<http://www.afropress.com.br>).

In the first part of the text, a brief contextualization is carried out regarding the presence of Afro-Descendants in Brazil, reviewing historical processes of slavery, resistance, inequality and mobilizations of black populations in the country. In these processes, we identify the establishment of Afro-Brazilian activist social-communication networks set in motion by Africans enslaved by the black slave trade and that have extended into contemporary times through the black movement's uses of communications technology to construct and add visibility to struggles for racial equality and citizenship by Afro-Descendants in the country.

In the second part of the article, through a case study, we analyze a specific case of network communication development by the black movement, developed by Afropress news agency. The agency is one of the pioneering initiatives in Brazil that uses network communication as a main strategy for generating flows of communication to construct and add visibility to the socio-cultural experiences of Afro-Brazilians and the agendas of struggles for racial equality. In the article, we review the trajectory of establishing and action by the news agency to engage in an analysis of the uses and appropriations of the internet in Afropress network communication strategies. In this analysis, we focus on the agency's coverage of a specific episode of racism that had national repercussions, resulting in criminal charges being filed against those responsible for the aggression.

## 2. Methodology

From a Latin American cultural studies perspective (Jacks, 2009; Martín-Barbero, 2008, Orozco Gómez, 2010), we seek to analyze social appropriations and uses of the internet by Brazilian black movements in the context of reconfiguration of users' interactions with the media, engendered by the society in network and by the expansion and convergence of communications technology. As Castells (2009) has pointed out, we believe that communications networks are activated thanks to communicative subjects that have increasing effects on determining both message content and destination, acting simultaneously as producers and receivers of multi-directional message flows.

This has been collaborating to intensify the emergence of communicative intervention micropolicies on the part of social actors and movements and imposing reorientation on studies of reception, appropriations and the use of media, one of the main realms of Latin American cultural studies. Within the framework of these reorientations, Martín-Barbero (2008) posited for research with Latin American reception the displacement of the analysis of consumption or reading the media to an analysis of "empowerment" processes or the production of "politics of the subject," generated through experimentation with communications technology like the internet based on production processes and publication of content and the generation of exchanges and sociabilities.

This postulate by Martín-Barbero guided us in establishing a methodological trajectory of a qualitative character for the case study on the uses and appropriations of the internet by Afropress news agency as a strategy to generate communicative flows towards the construction and visibility of Afro-Brazilian socio-cultural experiences and agendas of racial equality struggles.

The case study consisted of observing and mapping Afropress News Agency's spaces on the internet (especially the site and social networks), non-par-

ticipatory observation of the agency's production processes at Afropress headquarters in the city of São Paulo, and semi-structured interviews with the coordinator and several contributors from the network made up by the News Agency.

Since June of 2010, daily monitoring has been conducted of the agency's website and its pages on social networks like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Beginning in July of 2011, the research began to include weekly captures of main page views, as well as the day's cover story. Other spaces where Afropress is present are also being monitored, such as blogs. This mapping consisted of identifying the main themes dealt with by the agency on their site and other spaces on the internet, update frequency, types of user interactions, the most controversial information and news published, and which news led to repercussions in other communications outlets.

In October of 2011 and November of 2012, two observations were made of Afropress production process at its headquarters in São Paulo. During this period, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with Afropress' editor-in-chief and via internet with three of the agency's main contributors<sup>2</sup>, residing in London, New York and the Northeastern Brazilian city of Maceió. Five journalists<sup>3</sup> were also interviewed that are tied to different types of media and sectors of society that are in contact with Afropress' work on a regular basis, either to schedule stories for the communications outlets they are part of or to exchange information with the agency.

The data collection process allowed us to provide evidence that coverage of an episode related to the struggle for racial equality in Brazil had great public repercussions, provoking a flow of stories on the part of other national media outlets, intensifying the dynamics of users' interaction with the site and mobilizing broad involvement and participation of the Afropress coordinator. It involved a case of racial discrimination suffered by electronics technician and University of São Paulo (USP) security guard Januário Alves de Santana at the Carrefour supermarket chain.

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[02] Alberto Castro, a journalist who lives in London; Edson Cadette, technologist in Business Administration who resides in New York; Andrea Pacífico, a lawyer and a PhD in Social Sciences, who lives in Maceio, State of Alagoas, Brazil.

[03] They are: Ivan Seixas, president of the São Paulo State Council on Human Rights; journalist Roldão Arruda, columnist for one of Brazil's largest circulating daily newspapers, *O Estado de São Paulo*; journalist Rejane Romano, responsible for the communications sectors of the NGO Afro-Brazilian Society of Socio-Cultural Development - Afrobras, which as one of its projects maintains a new agency, a magazine, a TV program and *Faculdade Zumbi dos Palmares*, concerned with the inclusion of students with African heritage in higher education; journalist Hamilton de Souza, editor-in-chief of one of Brazil's most important alternative media publications, *Caros Amigos* magazine; and journalist Simão Zigband, communications coordinator of the São Paulo State Journalists Union.

In addition to having been an episode of racism promoted by Afropress that achieved public notoriety, Januário's story was the first case of racial discrimination in Brazil where those involved in the aggression were charged with the crime of torture motivated by racial discrimination. This evidence regarding the visibility achieved by a specific episode directly related to struggles for racial equality led us to pursue a more detailed analysis, in the case study proposed in this article, of coverage by Afropress news agency of the Januário story, to complement the more general analysis of internet use in Afropress' network communication. Januário Alves de Santana was also interviewed during the research.

### **3. Discussion and results of the investigation**

#### **3. 1 Networks of ancestry and social-communication flows<sup>4</sup>**

Long before 1400, the African continent's 30,522,000 km<sup>2</sup> was inhabited by many ethnic groups, constituted by many and various peoples organized into kingdoms and complex societies. On the black majority continent, men and women maintained internal and external routes in a context of intense negotiation. These flows ensured circulation and cultural and communicative exchanges of news, recipes, myths, fashion, music and dances, with a diversity marked by languages, dialects, beliefs, customs and traditions.

Between 1451 and 1870, the advances of the Europeans towards the “discovery” of new worlds ended up transforming Africans into merchandise. The black slave trade carried approximately ten million Africans across Europe and the Americas. In the Americas, Brazil was the country that enslaved the largest number of Africans. According to Lopes (2004), it is likely that over five million people were brought to the country from the many slave markets. Some of the main points of origin for enslaved Africans brought to the American continent were “Gorée, no Senegal; Cacheu, na atual Guiné-Bissau; Ajuda, no atual Benin; Old Calabar, na Nigéria; Loango e Luanda, em Angola” (Gorée, in Senegal; Cacheu, in what is now Guinea-Bissau; Ajudá, in what is now Benin; Old Calabar, in Nigeria; Loango and Luanda, in Angola) (Lopes, 2004, p. 7).

However, determining the exact African ethnicities present in Brazil brings one face to face with a scenario of scarce references, since a great deal of data and documents have been lost, burned and hidden by the very context of the slave era.

Oliveira Silveira (2005) has suggested the Bantus came in greater numbers, leaving clear marks on the Portuguese language in Brazil. But the memory of the Yorubas, shared by the Africans who arrived in the 19th century, is what has beco-

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[04] We have made use of some references presented in a previously published article to elaborate this item. See Cogo, D. & Machado, S. (2011).

me one of the most visible, especially through the practice of religions originating in Africa in the country.

African oral traditions, dances, games, martial arts like *capoeira*<sup>5</sup>, and musicality reveal the body language and symbolism of traditional African cultures readapted to the space and time experienced by Africans brought to Brazil. In the context of the Diaspora, it was this musical orality that was one factor responsible for the preservation of the memory and the persistence in creating Afro-Brazilian culture, keeping elements of black African culture alive in Brazil. Elements that can be considered precursors of the social-communication networks of resistance to slavery, racism and inequality constituted in the trajectory of this black presence in the country.

The constant, longstanding movements of struggle and resistance by Afro-Descendants, the growth of abolitionist groups, pressure from other countries, the implementation of a series of restrictions on the slave trade and a series of other political, social and economic factors gradually led Brazil to abolish slavery on May 13, 1888, with the signing of Imperial Law 3,353, known as the *Lei Áurea* (Golden Law). It was the last country on the American continent to legally extinguish slavery (Ferreira, 2004: 39)<sup>6</sup>.

In addition to these facts, Brazilians began receiving news of growing slave rebellions occurring in other countries, which inspired insecurity in authorities and land owners, and effervescence in abolitionist movements and in the *senzalas*<sup>7</sup>. One of these conflicts was the Revolution in Haiti, then a French colony, between 1791 and 1804. The struggle of that army, consisting essentially of enslaved black soldiers resulted in the abolition of slavery and the country's declaration of independence, the first in the Americas to abolish slavery and the second to gain independence.

Thus, the climate of tension with constant slave rebellions, both in Brazil and other countries, the pressure from abolitionist movements and evidence of

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[05] A 'martial art,' or game, as it is better known, which combines music and body blows, created by Afro-Brazilians with influences from the African and Brazilian cultural repertoire, with the goal of self-defense. Prohibited during the time of slavery and until 1930, today *capoeira* is considered part of Brazil's cultural heritage and has a strong national and transnational presence and recognition.

[06] It is important to remember that the following year, 1889, a new political regime began in the country with the proclamation of the Republic. At that time, while Princess Isabel Cristina Leopoldina de Bragança, daughter of Emperor Dom Pedro II, was signing the Golden Law, which abolished slavery, the slave traffic between Brazilian and English ports had already been prohibited through an agreement signed in 1826.

[07] Building constructed with clay, straw and wood that served as housing for enslaved blacks where they were imprisoned and only allowed outside to work or be physically punished. There were no dividers between areas, they were poorly ventilated and lacked furniture, with captives sleeping on the floor or on straw mats.

the economic infeasibility of the slavocratic system gradually led to the replacement of slave labor by free labor.

### 3. 2 The racial whitening policy in Brazilian society<sup>8</sup>

With slavery abolished in Brazil, the solution found to supply labor, almost exclusively black, was remuneration of European and Asian settlers for work in rural areas and other sectors. Some ex-slaves became free laborers, although they faced difficulty, since they were frequently passed over at hiring time. After abolition, when they did not succeed in negotiating rules and conditions for the new labor regime with land owners, part of the freed slaves had to part from where they lived, leaving them without the means to support themselves.

These new citizens of the recently-proclaimed Brazilian Republic did not have rights to any portion of the land they had worked on their entire lives, nor were they supported by any form of reparation policy on the government's part. In this way, a significant contingent of Brazilians did not have the opportunity to become integrated in this new political and economic regime. This resulted in growing conditions of misery for this parcel of the population, reflecting on processes of social inequality in evidence to this day in Brazilian society.

It is also worth remembering the intensification of an immigration policy by the country marked by the ideology of racial whitening, which was directly tied to the process of consolidating the Brazilian nation since its Independence, above all between the final decades of the 19th century and the turn of the 20th. Between 1819 and the end of the 1940s, approximately five million immigrants arrived in the country, above all in Southern Brazil and the state of São Paulo. They were mainly Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, German and Japanese immigrants, but there were other groups in fewer numbers, namely Russians, Austrians, Syrio-Lebanese and Polish (Seyferth, 2007).<sup>9</sup>

Thus, in Brazil the whitening policy took on a specificity that conditioned race relations in a way that is different than what is observed in other nations. The conception of "white supremacy," in which those not matching the standard should be eliminated, was substituted by the admission of "white superiority," where there is a hierarchization of races and the exclusion, or simply the non-inclusion of those

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[08] We made use of some references presented in a previously published article to elaborate this item. See COGO, D. & BADET, M. (2013).

[09] According to Seyferth (2007), despite efforts by the Imperial government, which until the end of the 1870s had made use of agents to bring immigrants from Europe, massive immigration only took place with the Republic, especially from 1887 to 1914, when nearly three million immigrants arrived in Brazil. It is worth emphasizing that later, Brazil continued receiving immigrants until the 1950s and 1960s.

considered “different” or “inferior.” This can be attributed to the fact the country historically underwent an ongoing and intense process of miscegenation that ended up creating a multi-racial nation and not a bi-racial or clearly polarized one, as is the case with European countries or the United States. A fact that does not reduce the incidences of racism that persist to this day in Brazil.

Faced with the impossibility and at the same time disinterest in reverting the Brazilian population’s miscegenation process, the intellectual, scientific and political elite drew up a strategy to rationalize this reality, reinforcing the assimilationist ideology, as pointed out by Skidmore (1991), or whitening, which would lead to what is referred to as the myth of racial democracy.

In this way, miscegenation is glorified based on the postulate of peaceful cohabitation and union of the three races - white, black and Indian - that formed the country, constituting the myth of racial democracy. A theory that gained popularity in the writings of Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre<sup>10</sup>, the racial democracy operates in the realm of social relations, a sleight-of-hand trick to hide racism and the conflicts and inequality existing among ethnic groups in Brazil, becoming one of the most significant cultural dimensions for understanding Brazilian racial and cultural relations. At the same time, its deconstruction, taken up as one of the first named causes for struggle by black Brazilian social movements, remains on the country’s anti-racist activist agenda to this day, which requires it to be recognized as a central narrative in the synthesis of the national identity.

### **3. 3 Racial inequality in the world’s blackest country outside the African continent**

In 2008, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)<sup>11</sup>, conducted a dedicated interview-based study on the question of race in the country<sup>12</sup>, with the goal of understanding the social importance of the subject color/race

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[10] In his most famous work, *Casa Grande & Senzala* (The Masters and the Slaves, first published in 1933, by Global Editora), Gilberto Freyre expresses his reading of Brazilian socio-cultural formation, valuing the miscegenation between black, white and Indigenous people and the relationship between the mansion where the slave owners lived and the shanties where the enslaved black people were held captive in the construction of social relations in the country.

[11] The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics is a government agency responsible for conducting the census in Brazil.

[12] Entitled “Pesquisa das Características Étnico-Raciais da População: um Estudo das Categorias de Classificação de Cor ou Raça” (Research on Ethno-Racial Characteristics of the Population: a Study of Classification Categories by Color or Race - PCERP). Its results are available in Portuguese at: [http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/caracteristicas\\_raciais/default\\_raciais.shtm](http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/caracteristicas_raciais/default_raciais.shtm) - Visited on January 10, 2012.



and obtaining references towards improving the system of classification of color or race applied during the census taking conducted by the institute. Although the debate regarding race relations in Brazil is permeated by the discourse that miscegenation has made it impossible to define people's race and color, 96% of interviewees in the study stated they knew their own color or race, declaring they were able to classify themselves.

As a response to an open question, 68% of interviewees ended up pointing to one of five categories of color/race - *preto* (in Portuguese, the color black), *branco* (in Portuguese, the color white), *pardo* (mulatto), *amarelo* (in Portuguese, yellow is figuratively used to refer to persons of Asian descent, without the connotations it holds in English), and Indigenous - that have been in use in the census conducted by the IBGE. In addition to these, some interviewees chose to respond with the variations *negra* (black/negro) and *morena* (dark skinned), and the gradations *morena clara* (lighter dark skinned) and *morena escura* (darker dark skinned). Other terms mentioned by less than 1% of interviewees include Brazilian, mulatto, *mestiça* (mestizo), German, Italian and Indigenous.

For the interviewees in the IBGE study, the factors that define one's race are mainly associated with the color of their skin, physical traits and family origins. As for the influence of aspects of color and race in realms of social life, over half the interviewees confirmed this influence, especially in areas like work, justice/police and social cohabitation in general.

The results of the study contribute to thinking on the relevance of race and color categories in the organization of Brazilian society based on conformation of socio-economic asymmetries originating from a slavocratic system and resulting from an exclusionary process of abolition of slavery, as experienced in Brazil. Resulting from the socio-historical post-abolition processes, the inequalities between whites and Afro-Descendants in Brazil touch on different realms of social life. Although there have been quality of life improvements for Afro-Brazilian populations in the country, socio-economic inequality persists in comparison with non-Afro-Descendants.

It has been possible to observe consonance between "class lines" and "color lines" in Brazil, to the point that both corroborate each other reciprocally. In other words, the majority of Afro-Descendants are in lower socio-economic strata of the Brazilian population, according to Paixão, Rosseto, Montovanele, and Carvano (2010), as registered in the "Relatório Anual das Desigualdades Raciais no Brasil, 2009-2010: Constituição Cidadã, seguridade social e seus efeitos sobre as assimetrias de cor ou raça." (Annual Report on Racial Inequality in Brazil, 2009-2010: Establishment of citizenship, social

security and its effects on asymmetries of color or race).<sup>13</sup> In comparisons of higher education access from 1988, 1998 and 2008, in the most recent decade the report demonstrated the biggest leap, with a 14.7% increase in the total number of students admitted to higher education in Brazil, the largest growth in terms of university access in a 20-year period.<sup>14</sup>

The report's organizers related the rise in higher education admission rates in Brazil to the growing adoption of affirmative action policies for Afro-Descendents and low-income citizens as well by public universities, and to federal incentive programs like scholarships to private institutions like the *Programa Universidade para Todos* (University for All Program - ProUni) and the *Programa de Financiamento Estudantil* (Student Funding Program - Fies). Included with these are initiatives by black social movements, such as the creation of accessible college entrance exam preparatory courses aimed at black and low-income students.

Despite the significant increase in the number of students enrolled in Brazilian higher education, inequality between white and black and *pardo* students persists. According to the report, during the 20 years that have been mapped, between 1988 and 2008, the percentage of white students at universities is practically double that of black and *pardo* students.

Another factor, related to educational access, is job market insertion and salary levels achieved by white and black and *pardo* Brazilians. According to the 2010 census, for the comparison of the last ten years the earnings of blacks or *pardos* is still inferior to that of whites. And although the difference between indicators of salary performance of these groups has diminished for the period, it still persists. In 1999, the hourly income of black workers was 47% that of white workers, and for *pardos* it was 49.6%. A decade later, in 2009, both black and *pardo* workers showed hourly earnings equivalent to 57.6% of white workers.

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[13] Publication organized by the Laboratório de Análises Econômicas, Históricas, Sociais e Estatísticas das Relações Raciais (Laboratory of Economic, Historical, Social and Statistics of Racial Relations - Laerser), harbored by the Economic Institute of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (IE-UFRJ), this report analyzes the evolution of inequality due to color and race and groups by sex in the country, based on updated social indicators from the databases of the Ministries of Health, Education and Social Development and the Fight Against Hunger. The indexes are organized and interpreted according to two categories of color: whites and black & pardos (mulattos), the latter two placed in the same group, representing the black population. In the readings of the numbers, the divisions corresponding to men and women are still considered.

[14] This is a 20-year period in the history of Brazilian society in which it was possible to see a proportional increase of 197.8% in the total number of higher education students in the country, since between 1988 and 2008, the gross rate of schooling rose from 8.6% to 25.5%.

For the most part, these differences are related to social and political conflicts that surround the definition and self-definition of what it means to be black in a Brazil seen as mestizo and where the myth of racial democracy persists. Calling into question the analysis of self-identification categories of black Brazilians, anthropologist Kabengele Munanga (2004) is working to synthesize the complexity of systems of belonging that demarcate the identitarian experiences of Afro-Descendants in Brazil. According to the author, the concepts of black and white have ideological and political foundations, not biological ones, helping to explain why there are black people who have internalized the ideal of whitening and do not consider themselves to be black. This principle explains how political the position taken by organized black movement becomes when it qualifies any person who appears as such as black.

Munanga's thinking collaborates equally to designate the ambiguity between physical traits and symbolic belonging, calling attention to the political nature the question of race takes on in Brazil and that in many cases has converged towards different manners of mobilization and struggle by black populations for racial equality. As an anti-discursive strategy constructed by black social and intellectual movements, the efforts in attributing positive connotations to the term *negro* have contributed to the unfolding of a blackening process in Brazil, and as a consequence new updating of identities, such as those in which non-black looking people self-declare as black, either by origin or empathy.

The statistics emerging from the most recent Brazilian census<sup>15</sup>, conducted in 2010, evidence a scenario of transformation important to thinking about this context. For the first time in the history of the Brazilian census, the percentage of black people has surpassed that of white people in the population. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), which has carried out this mapping since 1940, out of the 191 million Brazilian in 2010, 91 million classify themselves as white, 15 million as black, 82 million as *pardo*, 2 million as *amarelo* and 817,000 as Indigenous.<sup>16</sup>

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[15] In its 12th edition, the Census visited approximately 58 million residences in 5,565 cities nationwide, collecting data regarding the social and economic conditions of the population consisting of 190,755,799 inhabitants. See, in Portuguese <http://dssbr.org/site/2012/01/a-nova-composicao-racial-brasileira-segundo-o-censo-2010/>

[16] Prior to the realization of the latest demographic census by IBGE in 2010, the black movement promoted the campaigns "Censo 2010 – Assuma a sua Negritude!" (2010 Census - Assume your Blackness!) and "Quem é do AXÉ diz que é" (Those involved with AXÉ say they are), aiming to raise awareness of the population and census takers towards self-declaration more committed to Brazilian reality, since in their responses to the census, some black Brazilians still self-declare as white and some Brazilians who practice Afro-Brazilian religions self-declare as catholic. See [www.afrocensos2010.wordpress.com](http://www.afrocensos2010.wordpress.com)

A reduction in the proportion of white people was seen, since in 2000, the percentage was 53.7% and in 2010, it was 47.75; while the number of black people rose from 6.2% to 7.6% and *pardos* rose from 38.5% to 43.1% during the same period. With these results, the black and *pardo* population is now considered the majority in Brazil at 50.7%. From a political point of view, the emblem surrounding ethnic self-belonging expressed in demographic census taking works in favor of situating the racial debate around what it means to be black, indentify as black or be called black in Brazil.

In the ideas and practices of the black movement in Brazil, it has become evident that being black also means having your history and life related to the African Diaspora; to resistance to slavery; to the struggles of *quilombos*<sup>17</sup>; to the mixing of “races” that reveal Africanness; to overcoming limitations of available living conditions; to the creation of traditional religious communities and brotherhoods; to the creation of their own social clubs for segregated black communities; to the “alternative” black press; to black literary and artistic manifestations; to the expressions of samba, carnival, *capoeira*, hip-hop and graffiti; to the unequal relations with other ethnicities that compose the country. But being black in Brazil also means being faced with the need to deconstruct a recurring argument that attempts to empty racial prejudice in the country, dislocating social inequality from the ethnic and situating it on the question of class. In other words, it is poor people, not black people, who are not moving up socially.

The media has also been pointed out in Brazil as one of the main cases of racist exclusion or inclusion of Afro-Descendants, as evidenced by it being the specific topic of the Media and Racism Seminar (Ramos, 2002), held in Rio de Janeiro in 2001, and which mobilized different social agents inserted in the Brazilian media world. The seminar’s considerations were included on the agenda of the Third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa in 2001.<sup>18</sup>

In the academic context, among those investigators who have studied the relationship between media and blackness, Silva and Rosemberg have given great

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[17] *Quilombos* were refuges that emerged during the 17th century, created by escaped slaves, Indians and poor white people. where they lived in a community and sheltered each other from the tyranny of the slave owners and social inequality. We will return to the question of the *quilombos* later in the article.

[18] Said processes collaborated towards the creation of the Special Secretary on Racial Equality Promoting Policies (2003), itself anteceded by the institution of the Interministerial Work Group towards Valorization of the Black Population (1995), and by the creation of the Palmares Cultural Foundation (1988), all the agencies of the Federal Government for which the black movements collaborated strongly towards their emergence.

room for thought about the representation of Afro-Brazilians in the media field, stating that “a mídia participa da sustentação e produção do racismo estrutural e simbólico da sociedade brasileira uma vez que produz e veicula um discurso que naturaliza a superioridade branca, acata o mito da democracia racial e discrimina os negros” (the media participates in sustaining and producing Brazilian society’s symbolic and structural racism, since it produces and broadcasts a discourse that naturalizes white superiority, accepts the myth of racial democracy and discriminates against black people) (Silva & Rosenberg, 2008: 74).

A scholar on the relationships between media and ethnicity, researcher Solange Couceiro (2010) has situated the growth in academic interest in the subject of Afro-Brazilians in media to the 1970s, a period in which there was also growth in the number of research projects focusing on the broader question of race. Although not terribly significant, this growth can be attributed, according to Couceiro, to the expressiveness the question of race has taken in Brazilian society, as well as the expanded presence of black students in universities, which helps establish a relational movement between academics and activism.

In recent years, Afro-Brazilian study groups and similar departments have been created in a variety of areas of knowledge in the country’s colleges and universities. In the field of communications, the subject has earned more space in study groups and specific research has been harbored by universities in different Brazilian regions. Since 2000, the *Associação Brasileira de Pesquisadores (as) Negros (as)* (Brazilian Association of Black Researchers) has promoted the *Congresso Brasileiro de Pesquisadores (as) Negros(as)* (Brazilian Black Researchers Congress – COPENE), lending visibility to the production of knowledge on ethno-racial relations, including those related to media.<sup>19</sup>

From a period of black activism and academic research marked by the (necessary) denouncement of negative representations of black people in the mass media, the current scenario points towards other itineraries under construction by the black movement itself and by academic thought. In these itineraries there is room for recognition of the insufficiency of denouncement and the need to understand the emergence and consolidation of communicative spaces for media production and creation by networks of Afro-Brazilians and black movements that result from society’s own reordering into networks and the possibilities being opened up by communications technology.

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[19] <http://www.abpn.org.br/copene>

### 3.4 Black movement and social-communication networks: stories of the struggle for racial equality

The obstacles faced by black people during the process of enslavement and after abolition contributed to driving resistance movements forward. Faced with a repressive slavocratic system, individual and even collective suicides ended up being, at least initially, the only possibilities for resistance by enslaved black people. Later, escape and the creation of refuges called *quilombos* established recurring movements of resistance to slavery in Brazil. For this reason, some scholars, such as Helio Santos (2001), consider the black movement one of the country's oldest social movements.

The organization of the *quilombos* was one of the most significant movements of resistance by enslaved black people in Brazil. It consisted of refuges installed in difficult to reach locations where runaway black slaves, Indians and poor whites found shelter and lived in community, far from oppression. These spaces multiplied throughout the country. One of them would become a reference point when speaking of organized black resistance to slavery. Quilombo dos Palmares, located in Serra da Barriga, in the state of Alagoas, Northeastern Brazil, is considered a symbol of the struggle for freedom by enslaved black people and its residents, between 20,000 and 30,000 inhabitants<sup>20</sup>, have received recognition for their astute organization and combative strength that led to their victory in many battles against innumerable invasions and attempts to destroy the *quilombo*.

One of the main leaders of Quilombo dos Palmares, who remains a symbol of black resistance to this day, was Zumbi, a word of African origin meaning "one who never dies." Born in the Quilombo but kidnapped as a newborn during one of the invasions of Palmares, Zumbi was raised by a priest who taught him to read Latin and Portuguese and baptized him under the name of Francisco. At the age of 15, Zumbi ran away to the Quilombo and took his African name. By the age of 17, he became the leader of the entire Palmares community, being respected by even the colonial authorities, who "viam nele o líder mais capaz e aguerrido da república negra" (saw in him the most capable and courageous leader of the black republic) (Freitas, 1984: 118).

In 1694, after resisting years of intense attacks Quilombo dos Palmares was surrounded, Zumbi was hunted, until finally, on November 20, 1695, he was assassinated. Nevertheless, Zumbi's death did not lead to a cooling down of the movements to resist and struggle against slavery; these would continue until abolition and continue to become updated contemporarily. The political miles-

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[20] There is no consensus among historians on this number.

tone of Palmares remains to this day preponderant in the reconstruction of "Afro-Brazilian history and culture," and the organization of black movements in Brazil, according to Santos (2001). In the present day, one struggle that has become part of the black movement's agenda has been the identification and demarcation of land in different Brazilian regions that belonged to quilombos and where families descending from the peoples who fought against oppression still live. According to *Fundação Cultural Palmares* (Palmares Cultural Foundation)<sup>21</sup>, approximately three thousand *quilombola* communities have been identified in Brazil and are home to thousands of families.<sup>22</sup>

It has also been more recently, when ethno-racial relations have become the object of academic study in Brazil, that researchers have begun to dedicate themselves to providing evidence of and comprehending the methods of organization of Afro-Brazilian populations oriented to the dispute for racial equality and citizenship. Researcher Joel Rufino dos Santos (1994) took the point of view of plurality to consider all entities and initiatives founded or promoted by African descendents in Brazil as black movements. Initiatives undertaken by *quilombola* communities, religious communities, black brotherhoods and black social clubs<sup>23</sup>. Also considered are black communicators and artists, activists of Afro-Brazilian literature, samba schools, capoeira centers, and the *Frente Negra Brasileira* (Black Brazilian Front - FNB).<sup>24</sup>

These and other forms of associativism, many over a hundred years old, culminated in the creation of several non-governmental organizations starting in the 1970s, focused on the cause of Afro-Descendents. As examples, we can cite, among others, the *Movimento Negro Unificado* (Unified Black Movement - MNU), present in several regions across the country; the *Articulação de Entidades de Mulheres Negras Brasileiras* (Articulated Entities of Brazilian Black Women) and *União de Negros pela Igualdade* (Blacks United for Equality - Unegro).

From the point of view of this heterogeneity, we can state that the Brazilian black movements has also been taking shape, in many cases, as a decentralized instance that acts in a network, in opposition to the logic of citizen exclusion. In

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[21] Public entity ties to the Brazilian Ministry of Culture created to promote and preserve Afro-Brazilian culture. See, in Portuguese <http://www.palmares.gov.br>

[22] However, only 193 communities hold titles to their land, a right assured by the Federal Constitution of 1988.

[23] From this perspective, the existence of black movements is considered in the plural, while in this text oftentimes the text appears in the singular.

[24] Founded in 1931, the *Frente Negra* (Black Front) created social-communication networks with branches in many states across the country.

these networks, black activists build ways of getting together, making connections and forming ties, at the same time in which they dynamize modes of social participation that seek to coincide with the agenda for racial equality in Brazil (Cogo & Machado, 2011).

We provide evidence that in the black movement, social networks have configured interactions between subjects, being able to present themselves as informal networks or they can become formally and institutionally organized from the collective action of groups with leadership power, and can even be hybrids of these two configurations. In addition, towards their organization and operation, the networks can rely on the mediation of information and communications technology, especially the internet, at the same time in which they are dynamized by species of “invisible webs” made up of interactions between subjects not mediated by this technology (Cogo & Brignol, 2011: 6).

Through the creation of spaces for local, national and transnational exchange and articulation, the configuration of black social movements in Brazil into networks has made social-communication interactions possible that are not however exempt from the disputes, hierarchies and asymmetries, centralized power structures and relations, that characterize many of the forms of citizen associativism and even some experiences of solidarity in network (Scherer-Warren 1998; Castells, 2009).

Considering the example set by other social movements, as well as for the black movement, technological convergence and possibilities of experimentation with technology have provided modes of appropriation and social uses that are oftentimes characterized as being diffuse, ephemeral and multi-dimensional, escaping more traditional organizational logic. Concerned with comprehending what they call changes in the culture of autonomy and expansion of the dynamic of mass self-communication, Castells (2009) alerts us of the significant increase in the potential of audiences to take charge of their own communicative practices. This autonomy is also tied to the destabilization of hegemonic logic of information transmission in a massive, generalized way, by a small group producing an indiscriminate collective, towards the possibility of information production and establishment of communication in a more decentralized way and distributed to segmented audiences (Cogo & Brignol, 2011).

### **3.5 The black press as precursor of social-communication networks**

The perspective of network communication by the black movement in Brazil is not new, and came into evidence in communications practices like that of the black press, the embryo of which can be seen in the manifestos resistance leaders posted in public spaces around their cities. These were the first wall-



based newspapers and denounced inequality and spread demands of Afro-Descendants. The first records of the appearance of the black press proper date back to 1833. One of the time's important publications was *O Homem de Cor* (The Man of Color), from Rio de Janeiro, owned by Francisco de Paula Brito, and was where Machado de Assis, a writer important to Brazilian literature, began his career. Both were Afro-Brazilians.

During the same period, similar initiatives proliferated in many states across the country, generating a large number of periodicals produced by and directed at the black population. One example is the newspaper *A Alvorada* (The Dawn), one of the longest circulating periodicals in the history of the Brazilian black press, which was produced in the city of Pelotas, in Southern Brazil (1907-1910; 1930-1937; 1946-1957). Directly tied to the black social club *Fica Ahi Pra Ir Dizendo* (Stay Where You Are to Speak Widely), from Pelotas, the newspaper reported on the ideals and ideas of an urban black elite, made up of laborers in the post-abolition period of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Researcher Jacira Silva (2001) analyzed the alternative role *A Alvorada* played in the cultural and educational formation of black communities, providing evidence of the marked presence of women in the local black press during historical periods when public spaces were predominantly occupied by white men.

At this time, the majority of black social movements still lacked either a defined political program or a broader ideological project. The politicization and systematization of the movements' ideals will gradually be developed by groups organized in different local contexts. This rearrangement began to occur more intensely at the start of the 1930s, with the appearance of the *Frente Negra Brasileira* (Black Brazilian Front - FNB). Founded in 1931, when the staff of one of the black press' newspapers *O Clarim da Alvorada* joined forces with a dissident group from *Centro Cívico Palmares*<sup>25</sup>, FNB was one of the most representative black entities of its time in Brazil, coming to enjoy a presence and followers in many Brazilian states.

This black press was also, in a certain sense, the precursor of later processes of occupation of mass media spaces towards agenda-setting, on the part of black activists, of stories related to racial equality. In the 1970s, the large-scale press in Southern Brazil made room for a story that would mark an important stage in the history of black Brazilians. In 1971, *Zero Hora*<sup>26</sup> newspaper promoted

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[25] *Centro Cívico Palmares* (Palmares Civic Center) was a black political organization engaged in the struggle against racism, founded in 1926, which came to be solely recreational in 1929, when its coordination was modified, leading to a series of divergences and distancing the entity from a large number of black intellectuals and leaders.

[26] See: <http://zerohora.clicrbs.com.br/rs/>

the first celebration of November 20, organized in the city of Porto Alegre and based on the demonstration promoted by *Grupo Palmares*<sup>27</sup>. Studied and suggested by poet Oliveira Silveira, the date is an allusion to the day *Quilombo dos Palmares* leader Zumbi died and is in opposition to the celebrations on May 13, the official date for the abolition of slavery, now considered a day to denounce racism (Silveira, 2003).

Since then, black activists around the country celebrate Black Awareness Day on November 20, a date made official by the Brazilian State in 2003, when it became part of the school calendar through Law 10,639/03<sup>28</sup>. This rising awareness is in tune with Afro-Descendant thinking on the Diaspora, evidenced in historical mobilizations like the Haitian Revolution (1791); the Pan-Africanism movement<sup>29</sup>, which had repercussions on the First Pan-African Conference held in London, in 1900; and in the Négritude movement begun between the two World Wars in France. Among these mobilizations, other highlights include the Civil Rights Movement in the United States in the 1960s, as well as other initiatives by black leaders that questioned the myth of racial democracy in Brazil.

Also in the 1970s, the United Nations sponsored publication of the MacBride report, entitled *Many Voices One World*. In it, the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems regarding the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO or NWIO), included the cultural diversity related to the media world. In the decades to follow, new social activists began to include the media environment in their recognition strategies, either occupying space on media tied to large private and public communications groups, or in managing alternative communications spaces. They make use of newspapers, television, community radio, magazines, videos, film, internet etc. to lend visibility to several aspects of the quotidian lives and struggles of Afro-Brazilians.<sup>30</sup>

Among the innumerable initiatives in this sense, communications projects by the public entity *Fundação Cultural Palmares* (Palmares Cultural Founda-

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[27] *Grupo Palmares* (Palmares Group) formed by black university students in the city of Porto Alegre, Southern Brazil, which gathered to challenge May 13 as the day to celebrate the black movement and propose November 20 as Black Awareness Day, in replacement of the previous day. See, in Portuguese <http://oliveirasilveira.blogspot.com.es/>

[28] On January 9, 2003, the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases de Educação Nacional* (Law of Directives and Bases for National Education - LDB/1996) was changed by Federal Law 10,639 and in 2008, by Federal Law 11,645, making it mandatory to teach Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous History on the country's official basic education curriculum.

[29] *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (1887), by Edward Wilmot Blyden, from the Virgin Islands, is considered one of the founding works of Pan-Africanism.

[30] Due to space limitations, we have included just a few examples of media use by the black movement in Brazil in recent decades.

tion) can be cited, which in 1988, in a partnership with other groups from the black movement, constituted *Rede Palmares de Comunicação* (Palmares Communications Network), consisting of a radio station (*Rádio Palmares*), TV station (*TV Palmares*) and magazine (*Revista Palmares*, in a print version and available for download from the site).<sup>31</sup>

Another important communications initiative is the project *A Cor da Cultura* (The Color of Culture)<sup>32</sup>. Instituted as a public policy beginning in 2006, the project is made available to teachers in the Brazilian school system, offering a collection of information on Afro-Brazilian culture through a kit composed of graphic and audiovisual materials, and an internet page. By giving visibility to the subject of racism and raising the awareness of teachers to challenge discriminatory practices, the project motivated the revision of school curricular proposals on the subject of ethno-racial relations. Some researchers point out that the practical difficulties of implementing the project in schools has served as evidence of the lack of integration between the knowledge of the black movement, university research and management of government agencies in the promotion of Afro-Brazilian citizenship (Machado, 2008).

The use of technology by the black movement more recently include the appropriation of Internet spaces through communicative practices that are regulated by convergence and complementarity in uses of information and communications technology. Websites, portals, blogs, newspapers and online and print based bulletins, analog and digital radio stations, documentaries, social networks like Facebook, Twitter etc., are combined towards the establishment of more or less ongoing or transitory communicative practices by the black movement, which are in harmony, in a certain sense, with the influx nature of the information society and the expansion of what we refer to as digital media.

One of the recent initiatives of the Brazilian black movement on the internet is *Ìrohìn*. This periodical, whose name means news in Yoruba, was created in 1996, after the Zumbi dos Palmares March against Racism, for Citizenship and Life. As a source of information, *Ìrohìn* monitored the governmental actions regarding the promotion of racial equality, culminating in the realization of a training for members of black organizations on subjects related to public administration through media. In 2004, *Ìrohìn*, edited in a tabloid size newspaper format,

[31] The materials used at the time are available at <http://www.palmares.gov.br>

[32] The *A Cor da Cultura* (The Color of Culture) project is a joint partnership between the NGO Centro de Informação e Documentação do Artista Negro (Center for Information and Documentation of Black Artists); and the Federal Government, through the Education Ministry, the Special Secretary on Policies Promoting Racial Equality; and Globo TV network, through its Futura channel, with sponsorship from Petrobrás. See [www.acordacultura.org.br](http://www.acordacultura.org.br)

also came to have a site on the internet, where it makes stories from its print version available, in addition to other news, playing an important role in the mobilization of Afro-Brazilians. In this new online phase, activists become producers, earning technological skills, generating and re-elaborating information to collaborate on writing the newspaper.

Another example of these technology uses is Afrobras, a São Paulo-based organization founded in 1997, and focused on the area of affirmative action. Among the television programs the entity keeps on the air is *Negros em Foco* (Black People in Focus), hosted by black presenters and directors and focused on subjects of interest to Brazil's black population, such as safety, labor, representation of black people in the media, education etc. Among other projects, Afrobras also maintains the [www.afrobras.org.br](http://www.afrobras.org.br); portal; the Afrobras News agency; the magazine *Afirmativa Plural* (Plural Affirmative) and Zumba radio station.<sup>33</sup>

Another project that is representative of the black movements communicative experiences on the internet is the *Instituto de Mídia Étnica da Bahia* (Bahian Ethnic Media Institute, <http://www.midiaetnica.ning.com>), which since 2005, has been promoting the appropriation of processes of management and content production by Afro-Descendants. With the slogan "Vamos denegrir a Mídia" (Let's Denigrate the Media), the organization develops initiatives like its community training to work with a variety of media tools; the community video production network called *Insurreição Rítmica* (Rhythmic Insurrection) in collaboration with several institutions; the collaborative journalism portal *Correio Nagô* (Nagô Post)<sup>34</sup>, in addition to initiatives in favor of digital inclusion and training through the Cyber-Aruá project.

The increased use of the internet is also related to efforts by the black movement to give broader visibility to the debate on ethno-racial relations and share citizenship building initiatives with Afro-Descendent populations and the rest of Brazilian society. The democratization of computer prices, expansion of telephone service and addition of public digital inclusion policies have opened the way for growing –though still only partial– access to the internet. The phenomenon of network expansion in the country is the result of public and private efforts that are conforming possibilities of internet access from residences, public call centers, internet cafés, workplaces, teaching institutions etc. In harmony with this scenario, the black movement is also beginning to strategically explore the possibilities opened up by the internet for racial equality activism in Brazil.

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[33] In 2002, Afrobras created the Afro-Brazilian Institute of Higher Learning and instituted, with permission from the Education Ministry, the Universidade da Cidadania Zumbi dos Palmares (Zumbi dos Palmares Citizenship University -Unipalmares), the first in Brazil and South America concerned with the inclusion of black people in academic life.

[34] <http://www.correionago.com.br>

### 3. 6 The Afropress experience

As previously mentioned, the Third Durban Conference<sup>35</sup> represented an important step forward for the black movement in discussion on racism around the world. Inspired by this work producing initiatives to fight racial discrimination, in 2004, the *Agência de Informação Multiétnica Afropress* (Afropress Multi-Ethnic Information Agency) was conceived as one of the first Brazilian online news agencies with an agenda primarily focused on ethnic diversity and the struggle against racism.



Initially baptized *Agência Afroétnica de Notícias Afropress* (Afropress Afro-Ethnic News Agency), it was created with the goal of demarcating emphasis on an approach of matters related to Afro-Descendent populations. Later its name was modified to *Agência de Informação Multiétnica* (Multiethnic Information Agency), guided by the purpose of extending the scope of subjects approached to other ethnic groups. Nevertheless, despite this change, its main emphasis continued to be questions related to the Afro-Descendent world.

The visibility of the agenda to discuss racism promoted by Afropress mainly includes aspects related to the publication of explicit cases of discrimination

[35] Third World Conference against Racism and Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in 2001 by the United Nations in Durban, South Africa.

denounced by the black movement and monitored by the competent government entities, as well as expansion of the debate on affirmative action focalized by forms of media traditional for the black movement and society in general, and the valorization of Afro-Brazilian and African culture.

Afropress has been producing journalistic content since June of 2005, when it provided coverage in the Brazilian capital of Brasília, of the First National Conference on the Promotion of Racial Equality organized by Special Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality (Seppir) of the Cabinet of the Brazilian President. Since its creation, the Agency has also been engaged in mobilization regarding approval of the Racial Equality Statute in Brazil<sup>36</sup>, which aims to “combater a discriminação racial e as desigualdades estruturais e de gênero que atingem os afro-brasileiros, incluindo a dimensão racial nas políticas públicas e outras ações desenvolvidas pelo Estado” (fight racial discrimination and the structural and gender inequality that affect Afro-Brazilians, including the racial dimension in government policies and other initiatives developed by the State.) (Paim, 2006: 13).

Due to its activist work in spreading information of interest to the Afro-Descendent population, the Agency has been targeted by hacker attacks that have taken it off the air, in addition to having suffered threats aimed at its editor-in-chief via internet and telephone. After several attacks on the site and innumerable complaints from other victims, those responsible were arrested by the Brazilian police under accusation of the crime of racism.<sup>37</sup>

These episodes point towards a perspective surrounding the tension between freedom-control of the internet and have been the object of critical thinking by authors like Castells (2003). Although it offers the possibility for free, worldwide communication, the internet is mediated by political, commercial and ideological interests, indicating, according to the author, that the concern by social movements and sectors is beginning to have less to do with internet access and more to do with freedom on the web (Castells, 2003: 226).

When it was created, Afropress Agency was tied to the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) *ABC sem Racismo* (Racism-Free ABC), a São Paulo-based

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[36] Known popularly as the “Second Law of Abolition,” the statute, after ten years under debate, was approved by the Brazilian senate in June of 2010. Regarding the controversies on the changes to the original bill, see <http://www.afropress.com.br>

[37] The leader of the attacks was University of Brasília student Marcelo Valle Silveira de Melo, who aside from attacking other sites and Afropress and threatening the publication’s editor-in-chief, maintained sites with content that incited pedophilia and racism. The student was sentence to six years and seven months of prison, in addition to 192 days fine, or BRL 3,508.03, for crimes of racism, based on Brazilian Law 7,716/89, which sets up racism as a crime ineligible for bail.

entity that works to promote projects to fight racism. In August of 2012, Afropress separated itself from the NGO *ABC Sem Racismo* and continued operating as a small communications company. However, even having modified its business status, Afropress can still be considered an organization that belongs to black social movements, considering the perspective raised by Joel Rufino dos Santos (1994), previously referred to, who understands as black social movement any entities and initiatives at any time and of any nature that have the purpose of preserving Afro-Descendent cultural and fighting racism. Nei Lopes (2004: 455) has a similar perspective and considers that the black movement can be understood as a “conjunto de entidades privadas integradas por afrodescendentes e empenhadas na luta pelos seus direitos de cidadania” (group of private entities integrated by Afro-Descendants and engaged in the struggle for their rights of citizenship), mainly those emerging after the 1960s and supporters of the same international agenda of struggle.

Both *ABC Sem Racismo* and Afropress are led by journalist and lawyer Dojival Vieira dos Santos, who earned his bachelor's degree in journalism in the mid-1970s, and in law in the 1990s, from the *Universidade Católica de Santos* (Catholic University of Santos), in the state of São Paulo, where he also began his history of political action as a leader of the student movement.

Some of Dojival dos Santos most significant experiences in politics are his participation in the 1980s, on founding the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Worker's Party - PT) and serving as a city councilor for the same party in Cubatão, located in the state of São Paulo. In 2002, he was a coordinator for the Brazilian Education Ministry's (MEC) *Diversidade na Universidade* (Diversity at the University) program, which gave rise to MEC's *Secretaria de Educação Continuada, Alfabetização, Diversidade e Inclusão* (Secretary of Ongoing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion); and between 2006 and 2008, he presided over the *Comissão Intersecretarial de Monitoramento e Gestão da Diversidade* (Intersectorial Commission on Diversity Monitoring and Management - CIM-Diversidade), of the São Paulo City Department of Labor.

Currently, Dojival Vieira dos Santos does not hold ties with political parties, nor does he hold public office. In addition to coordinating Afropress and *ABC Sem Racismo*, he works as a consultant and speaker specializing in policies of valorization of ethno-racial diversity and as a lawyer.

Regarding the motivations that culminated in the creation of Afropress and the importance of using information and communications technology for the agency's work, Afropress' coordinator pointed out that,

the matter of invisibility in our media is a reality and is part of the strategy to make us invisible from the point of view of our presence in public

space, that's the question. The ideological mechanism of invisibilization has, in the media, in our invisibility in the media, a determining element. We are invisible in our public space. Currently, in this society of the spectacle, media is a central element to make public space visible. If we are invisible in the media, that only corroborates our invisibility in public space overall, our non-presence in public space.

So we noticed that to work with the media, it was fundamental to work with communications. So we looked for inspiration from the Durban Conference as well, which encourages the use of modern technology as a strategic instrument to fight racism. That would not have been possible 30 years ago, without the internet. I wouldn't have had the wherewithal to create a newspaper like Afropress. It would have required printing, so I wouldn't have been able to do a print newspaper. A print newspaper requires more infrastructure (Interview from October 5, 2011, for Dojival Vieira dos Santos).

### 3. 6. 1 How the agency operates

The agency's main interface for operation and visibility is its site, at [www.afropress.com.br](http://www.afropress.com.br), but Afropress is also active in other internet spaces, such as Facebook, Orkut, Twitter and YouTube<sup>38</sup>, where online content produced by the agency is made available and interactions are made more dynamic, nationally and internationally, with Afro-Descendants and other ethnic groups. Afropress' work is done with little material structure, since the agency's news room operates out of editor-in-chief Dojival Vieira dos Santos' home, where there is a small library with books on various subjects, two desks, a computer desk, a laptop computer, a printer, a broadband internet modem and a wireless router.

The material published by Afropress is produced by a network of approximately 20 contributors located in different regions across Brazil and in other countries<sup>39</sup>, including professionals with university degrees (like historians, journalists, sociologists etc.) and others without academic degrees, as well as people with and without ties to black social movements.

Since the foundation of Afropress, coordinator Dojival Vieira dos Santos and its contributors have worked to ensure the agency operates without receiving remuneration and have kept the site on the air without any financial support from

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[38] <https://www.facebook.com/afropress?fref=ts>; [www.orkut.com/Main#Community?cmm=pt-BR](http://www.orkut.com/Main#Community?cmm=pt-BR);  
<https://twitter.com/Afropress>; <http://www.youtube.com/user/afropressusa>;  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59bSX0ay9wY>

[39] Afropress has two correspondents in Germany, two in the United States one in England and one in Venezuela.



the government or other institutions<sup>40</sup>. Due to financial difficulties and to provide continuity to the project, the institution modified its business status from being an NGO to become a small company in 2012, making it possible to capture funds for the entity.

Observation of the production processes at Afropress headquarters and in an interview with the agency's coordinator have made it possible to see the agency's work is done through network articulation by many different professionals and institutions. This network makes it possible to exchange information, cooperate technically and to develop projects collaboratively. Dojival Vieira dos Santos, as editor-in-chief of Afropress, represents the main node of the network, establishing connections and hierarchies with other participating actors.

The network constructed by Dojival was essentially established through the symbolic and social capital<sup>41</sup> accumulated by the journalist over the course of his political career and life, which is also the result of the work done since the foundation of Afropress. Dojival's moving through many social fields, such as communications, law and politics, as the fruit of his militancy in black social movements and in actions by parties and the government, have made it possible to establish quite a diversified social network and this has been fundamental in the development of Afropress' work, and its insertion in different social and institutional realms. In this process, the use of the internet added further potential to the expansion of this network, making it possible and intensifying not only local connections, but national and transnational ones, in the production and distribution of content, as Dojival points out:

As it is via internet, via the world wide web, our work now has global reach, we have correspondents in New York, London, and nationally we are read all across Brazil by researchers, students, activists, and anyone interested.

So Afropress' first idea was to work on communications from a perspective of non-partisan political and social activism. That means working on communication not only as an element, as an object of academic study, but to work from the perspective of communications as an instrument of empowerment for all people and entities that are struggling for equality in Brazil. For that reason, we see journalism, communications as a fundamental instrument in a racist society, in which the means of communica-

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[40] Information provided by Dojival Vieira dos Santos in November 2012 interview.

[41] For further clarification on symbolic and social capital, see: Bourdieu, P. (1974). *The Economy of Symbolic Trades*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.

tion reflect this racism, practices institutional racism, by way of the invisibility of this subject and questions (Interview given on October 5, 2011, for Dojival Vieira dos Santos).

Contact with the network is one of the main steps that starts the process of producing content. Stories published by Afropress are produced by contributors that send writing to the different sections of the agency's site, and by Dojival Vieira dos Santos, who revises and posts all stories on the internet. This work is carried out from Afropress' main office, located in the home of its editor-in-chief, in São Paulo. One of the rooms in Dojival's residence, where there is also a small library with a variety of titles, holds two desks, a desktop computer, a laptop computer, a printer, a broadband internet modem and Wi-Fi router, and is where the Afropress content is produced and distributed from.

All writing is submitted to the editor-in-chief for evaluation and in some cases is edited by him before publication. In this sense, there is a clear hierarchy between contributors and the editor, who supervises all content. About the stories originating from the agency, the production process of the content does not follow a strict routine, being adapted to Dojival's daily life as the journalist responsible for the majority of the writing published in the news section.

According to the editor-in-chief, for the production routine the first action of the day is to check all email and information, along with his network of contacts and other communications media to check for stories in agreement with the subjects within the agency's scope. When the list of stories has been drawn up, information is searched for and sources consulted, oftentimes in the place where the news in question is taking place. The copy is then written and posted on the site. Later, the stories are distributed to a mailing list. According to Dojival, this aims at getting the content to a wide, diverse audience, not restricted to the black social movements.

The mailing list is very diversified and includes email addresses of entities and activists from black social movements and other social movements, such as those in defense of human rights. Also included are professionals from a wide variety of communications media, such as *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper and *Caros Amigos*<sup>42</sup> magazine, and also those with ties to alternative communications; to different sites; and government agency media like TV Assembleia, broadcast by the Legislative Assembly of São Paulo. Dojival Viera dos Santos pointed out that the agency's site is frequently visited by the press from the many different media publications to where the content produced is sent through the mailing

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[42] <http://www.folha.uol.com.br/>; <http://carosamigos.terra.com.br/>

list. According to the editor-in-chief, the increased number of visits to the site has been an indicator of the presence of visitors belonging to the agency's mailing list.

We have a mailing list of nearly 10,000 addresses across Brazil where we send material regularly. But we also do the work of getting our information to copy desks. I can say that *Afropress* is now read in the press rooms of Brazil's main media sources. In other words, our journalist peers have begun using *Afropress* as a source. Why? Because we do quality journalism. Because we do journalism always seeking to hear the other side, although we have our side (Interview given on October 5, 2011, for Dojival Vieira dos Santos).

The journalist also said that depending on the subject discussed, along with the email mailings, telephone contact is also made with professionals from his own network. Sometimes, other contacts are sought out in the media publications to present the stories produced and the open up other spaces for publication. In the words of the *Afropress* editor-in-chief, "há um trabalho de ativismo em conjunto com o de jornalismo" (there is activism work involved with the journalism), based on what he calls ("um trabalho de pressão pacífica nas redações." (working to put pacific pressure on media copy desks).<sup>43</sup> Oftentimes, these efforts result in the publication of the proposed stories, as will be told in this article regarding a case of racism involving a black man named Januário Alves de Santana, one of the most significant cases covered by *Afropress* and which earned public notoriety.

What I can tell you is that in recent years, the mass media has become more open to this debate and we have contributed in this sense, we have contributed a lot. Especially because many stories have begun to occupy space in the media, in the main outlets, and in the TV news on the main networks, they have arisen with us. Let me give you an example: the Carrefour story. Cases of violent attacks on black shoppers in supermarket chains. These are matters *Afropress* has discussed, because at first, the mass media ignored them. In the case of Januário Alves de Santana, at Carrefour, he spent a week going to many different media outlets and was not being heard (Interview given on October 5, 2011, for Dojival Vieira dos Santos).

Even when a piece of news comes from *Afropress*, the agency is not always cited as the source by other media outlets publishing the news. However, in

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[43] Information provided by Dojival Vieira dos Santos in November 2012 interview.

some cases like that of Januário Alves de Santana, it is possible to infer that its promotion was an initiative by the agency, since the story had not been broken by other communications media. Thus, it is possible to perceive that Afropress also has an influence on traditional media from its mailings and the activist work done by its editor-in-chief, Dojival Vieira dos Santos.

### **3.7 The Januário Alves de Santana case**

In the trajectory of Afropress' operation, one of the significant cases covered was that of the aggression suffered by electronics technician and guard at the University of São Paulo (USP) Januário Alves de Santana in the parking lot of Carrefour hypermarket in the city of Osasco, located in the São Paulo Metropolitan Area. The episode, published in the news section, reinforced the agency's practice of denouncing cases of racism and inaugurated Dojival Vieira dos Santos' work as a lawyer in racial discrimination cases, suggesting that Afropress' activism is not limited to journalism, but articulates communications and intervention in other levels of racial equality struggle.

Januário Alves de Santana went with his family to Carrefour hypermarket on August 7, 2009. While he was waiting for his sister, brother-in-law, wife and five-year-old son as they shopped inside, Januário waited next to the family car, a Ford EcoSport, taking care of his two-year-old daughter who was sleeping in the vehicle's back seat. The USP guard reported that he noticed strange movement in the store's parking lot, where men were circulating on motorcycles. He thought it might be an attempt to rob someone, which is why he paid close attention to what was going on. Then a man who was wearing neither a uniform, nor identification, ran towards him and pointed a gun at him, from which he instinctively tried to protect himself, thinking it was an assault.

The armed man and Januário entered the hypermarket fighting, until other men approached and identified themselves as Carrefour guards. Nevertheless, instead of helping Januário, they stepped on his head, immobilized him and accused him of trying to steal a motorcycle and his own car. Taken to a room by six employees, all the while trying to explain it was all a misunderstanding, Januário was beaten until the police arrived. The three police officers sent did not believe in Januário's version of the case, nor that he had worked for the past eight years at USP, even though he was wearing his uniform.

Thus, after one of the officers said that Januário "tinha cara de ter pelo menos três passagens pela polícia" (looked like someone with at least three arrests under his belt), another of the officers tested him, asking him what a guard's first procedure is. Still under the impact of the physical aggression he had suffered, Januário answered: "O primeiro procedimento é proteger a própria vida

para poder proteger a vida de terceiros” (The first procedure is to protect your own life so you can protect the lives of others). Only after his correct answer did they check the car’s documentation, despite Januário’s innumerable previous attempts to show the vehicle’s documents to prove it was his. After the aggression, the police officers and Carrefour guards realized Januário was innocent and telling the truth. Without giving him first aid, they then left him in the hypermarket’s parking lot.

Since he had been struck with the butt of a revolver and punched and kicked in the head, Januário Santana bled heavily and suffered a serious jaw fracture, in addition to losing teeth. Unable to drive, he called family members to take him to the hospital, where he had to undergo highly complex surgery to reconstruct his jaw and dental arcade. Two days later, Januário contacted USP’s Black Awareness Group and was directed by them to Afropress to draw attention to his cause and get legal assistance. He decided to file charges and asked the director of Afropress, Dojival Vieira dos Santos, to be his lawyer in the case. Though he had been entitled to practice law since 1996, the editor-in-chief of Afropress had never practiced before.

When he [Januário Alves de Santana] arrived here, he was still very hurt. It was just two days after the attack. I started to hear his story and was shocked. With every detail, I thought: it can't be. And I wrote it all down. Then at the same time I heard the story, I started becoming involved. You can't help becoming emotionally involved in what you do.

(...) So it was one of those things that happen in your life, it was striking. Because I’ve been a lawyer since 1996, but I worked either as a journalist or as a consultant, I wasn't practicing as a lawyer per se. The Januário story called me to action (Interview from October 5, 2011, for Dojival Vieira dos Santos).

The aggression and racial discrimination suffered by Januário had great repercussions in the press after the work to cover it by Afropress, headed up by its editor-in-chief. In addition to publishing news on the site telling what had happened, Dojival<sup>44</sup> also distributed information to other newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations and looked to his network for contacts at these media outlets to strengthen the story's visibility. Dojival carried out an activist initiative to begin promoting the case in different forms of media, including those with ties to large scale media conglomerates. And after ten days of intense coverage

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[44] Regarding the press coverage of the case, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zS99xEB09vU>

by the agency, he succeeded in obtaining the first publication of a note talking about the occurrence in O Estado de São Paulo newspaper<sup>45</sup>, a publication with large nationwide circulation. After the note was published, other media outlets sought out Afropress in search of clarifications to publish a more in-depth version of the story.

The case earned public notoriety after being promoted by the main communications sources in the Brazilian mass media, as well as by alternative media sources, the international press and other informational sites. The story found its way into print media, television and radio news programs. After three months, comprehensive examination of the case by the media and the lawsuit having entered the justice system resulted in an out-of-court settlement, which led to an indemnification of an undisclosed amount, and a formal apology to Januário on the part of Carrefour's management. In addition to the settlement, another part of the agreement proposed was the elaboration of a plan to raise employee awareness and provide training on matters related to fighting prejudice and racial or other kinds of discrimination.

The episode collaborates to provide evidence of how hard it is for situations of quotidian racism in Brazil to gain recognition, and its implications to begin public debate and a process of individual and collective mobilization around racial equality struggles in the country, as appears expressed in Januário's own report.

When it was published on the site and then all over the media, the story blew up. That was good because people began to understand how it happens every day. In fact, what happened on that day was them thinking I'd just be one more, but that's not how it turned out. We were able to show society and the competent authorities that it happens every day, gets covered up. But we have to make the most of it, be courageous and react.

Why did I react? I thought to myself: Well, through this prejudice, and it wasn't the first time, because I was already tired of going somewhere and being discriminated, taking the car out and being followed by the police. But I never used to tell anyone, I thought it was normal, because we live with it so much you start thinking its normal. Except during the supermarket episode, when I realized I could have died, that my two-year-old daughter could have died as well, I thought: not this time! Starting today, whatever happens, I'm going to fight against it. Because people can die for something that you could have fought against, and it would all end at that. And if you got the chance to put an end to it and you don't, you and other people will run the risk, and

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[45] <http://www.estadao.com.br/>

you become guilty in a sense, an accomplice, because you let things happen with other people. So on that day I decided to struggle against racism (Interview granted on November 9, 2012, for Januário Alves de Santana).

In February of 2011, the six guards who participated in the aggression were indicted by the São Paulo Police with the crime of torture motivated by racial discrimination, foreseen by law 9455/97 of the Brazilian Criminal Code. The police investigation concluded that the guards had committed the crime of torture motivated by racial discrimination and the three police officers who arrived on the scene had committed the crime of failure to provide aid. In December of the same year, based on the conclusion of the investigation, the Public Ministry presented the case to the São Paulo Court, which accepted the decision and filed charges against the crime of torture. This decision was the first of its kind in Brazil and may become an example for other similar cases.<sup>46</sup>

From a civil point of view, Januário's case was emblematic. It's an emblematic case that demonstrates we can also win, that our destiny as black people is not just to die, or be executed, or lose, it is also to win, it can be to win, it has to be to win. Because from a civil point of view it is an extraordinary victory, but it doesn't end there. From a criminal point of view, since 2009, we have been able to make the police authority that presided over the investigation alter the classification of the crime and accept its classification as a crime of torture motivated by racial discrimination. They were all charged based on Law 9455 (1997), which is the law on torture, and that was a first in Brazil (Interview given on October 5, 2011, for Dojival Vieira dos Santos).

In Brazil, it is common practice to keep an eye on Afro-Descendants in commercial establishments, as they are frequently considered by guards and police as suspects in committing crimes due to the fact their appearance does not correspond to the ethnic and socio-economic standards related to white and European people. Other cases of aggression against Afro-Descendants in supermarkets and other establishments have already been covered by Afropress after Januário Alves de Santana's case. The frequency of this practice has also been discussed by the agency and as a result of its collaborative network, the subject has also been dealt with by other communications media.

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[46] A date has not been set yet for the judgment to begin. If declared guilty, the foreseen punishment is eight years in reclusion.

Starting with this concrete case, it is possible to verify that Afropress seeks to make use of communication as a strategic instrument to fight racism and create ties between people, communities and society. The agency supplies itself with, as well as offers, editorial support to entities of black social movements, newspapers, magazines etc. Through network articulation, Afropress proposes to use the internet as a communicative strategy and environment to build and disseminate information and promote public debate on the struggle against racism and for racial equality.

Another preponderant element in this process are the social communicative actions generated as unfolding from the construction, production and media promotion of events involving discrimination and other racial themes. One of the examples is the mobilization of people who have suffered racial discrimination to denounce it and request judicial reparation for discriminatory situations. With the goal of providing assistance and psychological and legal advice to people who have experienced racial discrimination, Januário Alves de Santana and Dojival Vieira dos Santos are organizing the creation of an entity to assist victims of this kind of aggression, considered a crime in Brazil, and seek to punish their aggressors.

Another example is the trainings taken by employees of the Carrefour hypermarket chain, where the case of discrimination followed by physical aggression occurred. The fruit of the out-of-court settlement with Januário, initially the training to debate questions of diversity and respect for differences was carried out with the employees of the store where the problem occurred. However, after the action, a specific project was created to deal with these matters with employees at stores across Brazil. It became an ongoing project and the idea is for it to expand to employees of third party companies that work for the hypermarket, a change that would also include guards of stores that operate in this way.

### **3. 8 Final Considerations**

Beginning with the analysis proposed in this article, it is possible to note that social-communication networks are constituents of the trajectories of black social movements in Brazil. The African and Afro-Brazilian socio-cultural repertoire is joined through the use of different communication technology in the process of mobilization and collective action of black movements, opening and expanding spaces for communicative experimentation and management, production and distribution of content with the participation of Afro-Brazilians themselves. Afropress news agency is one of these experiences in which the tensions of (de)centralizations, hierarchies and disputes, characteristics of processes of empowerment of network communication, are associated with uses of communications technology, espe-



cially the internet, to face, construct, debate and give public visibility to an agenda of struggle for racial equality in Brazil.

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